

I am Bonnie Sabin, OFS, in the St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity. I was professed in 2018 with my friend Linda Virga and have recently become the new Spiritual Assistant. I've been learning much from this "Summer Saints Series," and it suddenly occurred to me to share a bit about Blessed Raimundo Lulio.

### **Blessed Raimundo Lulio (Ramon Lull or Llull, Raymond Lully)**

I first began really noticing Raimundo Lulio when I was in graduate school at St. Louis University working on my Master's in Spanish. Born not long after the death of Saint Francis, this Spaniard lived from 1235 - 1315. He was immersed in the three great cultures of the Iberian Peninsula: Christian, Jewish, and Arabic.

Raimundo seems to always have had a romantic nature. Early in life he was consumed by the desire for romantic exploits (even after his marriage). "But one day, as he sat composing a love song for yet another woman, he experienced a repeated vision of Christ crucified. Soon his wayward passions became ordered towards one goal: the love of Christ" (*Magnificat* August 2023, p. 376).

Raimundo became a Third Order Franciscan and a famed mystical poet. Spending much time in solitude, his mystical writings include *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved* (referring to God and the Christian), *The Art of Contemplation*, and *The Great Elixir*. Since his verse and prose written in Catalan employ rich and sensual images of Arabic poetry, Lulio is considered one of the principal links between the Islamic and Christian mysticisms of the Iberian Peninsula. Our Franciscan is indeed an antecedent of the great mystic saints of Spain's "Golden Age of Mysticism:" Juan de la Cruz (John of the Cross) and Teresa de Ávila!

Yet this mystic also did many *practical* things to spread the Gospel. He believed God was calling him to bring Muslims to Christ. How to do that most effectively?

By the thirteenth century, Muslim scholars had rediscovered the works of ancient Greek philosophers and were studying philosophy, mathematics, and science. (St. Thomas Aquinas would later use Greek philosophical concepts to invigorate Catholic theology and philosophy.)

Raimundo recognized this popular interest in Greek philosophy as an opportunity to reach Muslims. He therefore learned Arabic, as well as philosophy, theology, and science, and wrote hundreds of works in multiple languages, all designed to start conversations between Muslims and Catholics. He was unquestionably an outstanding apologist to Muslims in his day (Dawn Beutner).

In theology Lulio paved the way for the doctrine of Duns Scotus, whom he met in 1297. Lulio was the first theologian to use the expression "Immaculate Conception" regarding Mary, and he became known as the "*Doctor Illuminatus*."

Lulio made several missionary trips to Africa. In 1315 he set out for Tunis, where he was stoned to death by the Saracens. Within the Franciscan Order he is honored as a martyr.

I see in Raimundo's life these virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit: an awakening to the true love of Christ, deeper than any human romance; as a lay person, a willingness to devote much time to contemplation; and yet a readiness to work tirelessly in practical ways to take Christ to other cultures.

As Secular Franciscans we can learn from Raimundo as we are drawn more deeply to the Divine Romance with our God; in our prayer but also in the practicalities of our secular life that we are called to shoulder daily; and in not shying away from our brothers and sisters of other cultures with Franciscan love.



*The Book of  
the Lover and  
Beloved*  
by Ramon Lull



translated by E. Allison Peers